

Bureau of Land Management
Northeast California Resource Advisory Council

Field Tour and Business Meeting
Wednesday and Thursday, April 20 – 21, 2011
Burney, California

Summary Minutes

Wednesday, April 20

Council members participated in a field tour covering fire rehabilitation work at the Venture Fire east of Burney, at Hat Creek Park along Highway 299 east of Burney and at the Hatchet Wind Energy facility on Hatchet Ridge west of Burney. BLM Alturas Field Office staff members Peter Hall, Emily Jennings, and Claude Singleton participated. There was detailed discussion about the pros and cons of the BLM managing the Hat Creek Park as part of a land ownership transfer from PG&E to the BLM.

Thursday, April 21

Attendance

Category one: Ken McGarva, John Erquiaga, Skip Willmore. Absent: Todd Swickard, Jack Razzeto.

Category Two: Martin Balding, Alan Cain, Frank Bayham, Rosalee Bradley. Absent: Gale Dupree.

Category Three: Nancy Huffman (chair), Jim Chapman, Brad Hanson, Norvie Enns. Absent: Sean Curtis.

There is a quorum.

BLM Staff: Northern California District Manager Nancy Haug, Alturas Field Manager Tim Burke, Eagle Lake Field Manager Ken Collum, Surprise Field Manager Allen Bollsweller, Northern California District Public Affairs Officer Jeff Fontana.

Opening Business

The agenda was approved as presented. The minutes from the July meeting were approved as mailed.

BLM Reports

District Manager Nancy Haug welcomed new member Brad Hanson, thanked Skip Willmore for his assistance with the meeting logistics in Burney, and commended Tim Burke for arranging lunches during the field tour. She thanked RAC members for their contribution of time.

Nancy introduced Ken Collum and Allen Bollschweiler as new field managers for the Eagle Lake and Surprise Field Offices respectively.

District Manager's Report

Highlights of Nancy Haug's report:

- For northern California, grazing permit renewals are a priority for each field office. Environmental interest groups are watching the process closely; thorough environmental review will be essential to support decisions to renew grazing permits.
- Litigation continues on the Twin Peaks Wild Horse and Burro round up that was completed last fall with cases continuing in district court and in the Ninth Circuit appeals court.
- An environmental assessment is under development for the proposed High Rock Complex round up in the Surprise Field office. The plan is to gather about 1,200 horses in four herd management areas in the late summer or fall.
- Other district priorities include wind energy development proposals, new trail developments in the Redding area in conjunction with partners, completion of ARRA projects (\$3 million in northern California).

Responding to a question, Nancy noted that marijuana growing on public lands continues to be a big concern because of resource damage and dangers to public employees and public land visitors. BLM takes steps to keep employees out of areas when gardens are discovered. Clean up is expensive. BLM works closely with other federal and state agencies on enforcement and cleanup.

Nancy Huffman wondered whether the RAC can contribute toward solving the problem. Ken Collum suggested an awareness program for the public might be an aware where the RAC can become involved.

The issue can be on the next agenda. BLM will ask law enforcement and resource managers to participate.

State Director's Report

Nancy presented the following information from Acting State Director Jim Abbott:

1. **Leadership Team in Washington/State Office:** Things pretty much unchanged regarding our leadership in Washington. Our Assistant Secretary for Lands and Minerals, Wilma Lewis, has been nominated to a Federal judgeship by the President and will be

leaving Interior once confirmed. Jan Bedrosian, BLM-California's Deputy State Director for External Affairs, retired April 1. A search is underway for her replacement.

2. **Budget:** President Obama signed into law a continuing resolution that keeps the federal government funded through the end of fiscal year 2011. A provision inserted in the CR defunds Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar's wild lands Order 3310 of Dec. 23, 2010, through September.
3. **Legislation:** The 112th Congress is well underway. The primary focus of this Congress so far has been on budget issues. There are about half a dozen legislative proposals that we are tracking. A few that might be of interest to the RAC include:
 - H.R. 1581 by Congressman Kevin McCarthy – releases BLM wilderness study areas that are not suitable for wilderness designation and release U.S. Forest Service-inventoried roadless areas.
 - S. 138 by Senators Boxer & Feinstein establishes the Sacramento River National Recreation Area (Tehama & Shasta County) to be managed as part of the NLCS.
 - H.R. 1237 by Congressman Herger involves a land exchange between the BLM, Forest Service and Trinity Public Utilities District. BLM would acquire 47 acres, known as the Sky Ranch parcel.
4. **Wild Horse & Burro** - We are in "adoption season" with the number of adoption events picking up throughout the state. In May we have the Extreme Mustang Trail Challenge in Norco, where people can bid on trail trained horses. In addition, we have horses and burros available at the corrals in Litchfield and Ridgecrest. Currently, we have no funded gathers in FY2011 in California. Our biggest priority for the state is the High Rock Complex in the Surprise FO. Depending on the results of the budget, we hope to gather this area in the fall. We would be removing about a thousand horses from the area and leaving about 230. BLM-California's successful Twin Peaks gather near Susanville last fall has become a Bureau-wide model for public participation and transparency.
5. **BLM Priorities:** Renewable energy and America's Great Outdoors (including NLCS, youth initiatives and recreation) will be at the top of BLM-California's priority list for the remainder of the 2011 fiscal year.
6. **State Director's Message** – Most of the pundits in Washington are predicting some tough times ahead as the President seeks ways to reduce the deficit while stimulating growth to generate jobs. BLM-California will share in both – we expect a lower budget in 2011 and 2012, and we will continue to work hard on siting renewable energy projects that generate jobs and produce American energy. These goals, plus our ongoing portfolio of multiple use programs and projects, will likely keep all of us busy in 2011. Both nationally and locally, the BLM raises more revenue each year for American taxpayers than it spends. In California, the BLM brings in \$600,000 in royalties from wind projects and \$12 million from geothermal projects each year. The six solar projects approved last

year in the California desert could result in a combined total of nearly \$37 million in annual rent and royalties, once built out.

Nancy Huffman noted that she fears there is reluctance on BLM's part to support the work of RACs, saying the delays in appointments gives an indication that "they are not happy with us." She said the RACs are important and would not want to see them gradually phased out. She suggested that a comment on the RACs concern with naming state director reinforces the importance the RAC places on the BLM.

Jim Chapman said the best thing the RAC can do is strive to make its work relevant to the BLM leadership at the state and national levels.

RAC members expressed interest in sending a letter forward a letter expressing frustration at the delay in appointments and the importance of the work on the council.

Members agreed unanimously to the following letter to Acting State Director Abbott:

Dear Mr. Abbott:

Members of the northeast California Resource Advisory Council are deeply concerned about the long delay that was experienced this year in the council appointment process. While all members are frustrated that the delay in appointments caused an undue hiatus in the RAC's continuing business, some members are also concerned that the delay indicates that some in government leadership do not value the contributions of our advisory body.

Our resource advisory council provides a valuable service by bringing diverse public land interests to the table to provide input on management of public lands and natural resources which are vitally important to our communities and indeed, the citizens of the United States. In our view, this input from citizens with widely divergent points of view provides BLM managers with the information they need to develop informed decisions that are legally defensible. It is important work of great value.

We thank the Department of the Interior and the BLM for the opportunity to participate in public land management in a meaningful way, and are enthusiastic about continuing our public service. We appreciate any efforts that can be focused on maintaining an efficient council appointment process.

Field Trip Review

Tim Burke distributed a map of the lands proposed for BLM acquisition through the PG&E divestiture undertaking, including the five-acre Hat Creek Park that the RAC visited on the field tour. Tim asked for opinions on whether the BLM should agree to take on management of the Hat Creek Park parcel, with its high visibility and high maintenance demands. He noted that the RAC has already supported BLM's interest in acquiring the other lands proposed for transfer out of PG&E ownership and into public ownership and BLM management.

There was discussion about the predominant public use at the park, whether it is for public recreation or as a highway rest area or some combination of those uses.

Alan Cain noted that the site has valuable natural resource qualities that the BLM should be involved in, including a recreational fishery.

Jim Chapman said it would be a good fit if part of the larger acquisition, but not if considered alone. He said there is a BLM precedent for management of park settings: the Hobo Camp area near Susanville. He said the BLM needs to look at the long-term funding needs and management issues associated with managing a rest stop-style park immediately adjacent to State Highway 299. He said BLM should consider the long term funding prospects in light of today's current government budget situations. Long term fiscal impacts are a key consideration.

Nancy Huffman asked about a long term management plan. Tim responded that a plan is done for the other 8,000 acres under consideration, but not for the Hat Creek Park specifically. He said a public planning process would be completed if BLM acquired the parcel.

John Erquiaga: BLM should fully investigate the deed restrictions on the acquisitions.

Martin Balding: Lack of a water system at the park is an advantage because it enables the site to be operated during cold winter months. He would favor BLM management if budget concerns can be addressed.

Skip Willmore: Conservation Camp crews are an ideal workforce for park maintenance. He supports BLM management.

The following resolution was unanimously adopted:

Recommendation: The RAC supports the proposal that the BLM assumes management of the Hat Creek Park parcel as part of the larger assemblage of lands to be transferred from PG&E to public ownership, provided that long term fiscal considerations are addressed, and that deed restrictions are fully understood and compatible with public land management objectives.

Alternative Energy

Ken Collum summarized wind energy proposals on BLM-managed lands in northeast California. He said there have been no new discussions about major transmission line projects.

Horse Lake Wind is the most advanced proposal for the Eagle Lake Field Office. The proponent, Invenergy, has submitted a plan of development, but a draft environmental impact statement has not yet been released. Additionally, there are wind energy exploration proposals at Beckworth Pass, Shinn Peak, and Lava Peak. All three field offices are working on exploration permits in the Dodge Reservoir Area, the Snake Lake Area, near the Buckhorn Road, and the Hayes Range.

Martin Balding noted there is public opposition to placement of wind turbines on Fredonyer Ridge above Eagle Lake (the Horse Lake Wind proposal). He said development will be technically challenging as well. He was also concerned that the company has not released wind data from its meteorological towers, so the public has no way of knowing whether the development will produce the energy claimed and whether the project has long-term viability.

Frank Bayham noted there are significant cultural resources in the region. He said territories of the Native American tribes overlap, and there are important cultural values to be considered.

Tim Burke noted that the Pit River Tribe has indicated strong concerns with the Arrowhead project, which included a met tower on Knox Mountain. The tribe considers the area sacred. In response, the proponent has proposed installing a six-foot tall measuring device instead. He said a right of way is also proposed for Big Valley Mountain between Fall River Valley and Big Valley, which is the primary timber production area for the Alturas Field Office. The Pit River Tribe considers this a sacred area as well.

Medicine Lake Geothermal

Tim Burke summarized the latest developments in proposals for development of geothermal resources at Medicine Lake. Legal issues have surrounded proposals to develop 49-megawatt power plants at Fourmile Hill and Telephone Flat. Leases for geothermal development were first granted in the 1980s. In the most recent developments, the courts determined that the BLM improperly extended leases in the Four Mile Hill area, but determined those leases can be extended if the BLM and Forest Service complete a new Environmental Impact Statement on the extension of leases and possible geothermal development. At Telephone Flat, a suit was filed by the Pit River Tribe and the Save Medicine Lake Coalition to stop development of a power plant. No decision has been issued. There is a proposal that a single EIS could be completed for lease extensions and possible development in the entire region.

Wild Horses and Burros

The council reviewed the comments developed by its wild horse and burro management subcommittee. The comments were forwarded to the BLM Washington Office as part of a public comment period on proposals to improve the program.

Action: The RAC endorsed the subcommittee recommendation with the addition of changes that follow:

Sustainable Herds: Rosalee Bradley disagreed with the subcommittee members, saying that ramping up fertility treatment will be very effective. We need to see how effective the fertility control is before making a blanket statement.

Recommendation: The RAC position is that the BLM should collect data on develop more complete information on effectiveness of fertility control in order to implement effective fertility control. Trails with fertility control methods should be a continuing process. Ramping up fertility control is important in determining effectiveness.

Rosalee said that her constituents in the horse interest community are totally against helicopter use. They feel that helicopter use has not been shown to be the most humane and efficient manner to gather horses. Frank added that the imagery of helicopters chasing horses is very powerful and helps form public opinion.

Recommendation: The RAC's position is that helicopter use is essential and must be used with the best interest of the horses paramount. Helicopters must be used in the most humane way possible.

Recommendation: Overall, the RAC believes that the BLM is doing the best job possible in the management of wild horses and burros. The council supports efforts to make the process as humane as possible and cost effective, consistent with the documented positions of the Office of Inspector General and independent humane observers. The RAC recognizes there are budgetary constraints with managing wild horses and burros.

Jim Chapman asked that the minutes commend the Wild Horse and Burro Subcommittee for working hard on comments under a tight deadline.

Twin Peaks Roundup

Ken summarized the post count results from the gather that occurred over six weeks in August and September. A three-day helicopter-borne survey showed that 793 wild horses and 160 wild burros remain on the range after the six week roundup that removed 1,579 mustangs and 160 burros from the range.

High Rock Complex Gather

Allen Bollschweiler summarized planning work underway for a round up covering four herd management areas in the High Rock Complex: Bitner, Wall Canyon, High Rock and Fox-Hog. The field office is working on an environmental assessment for release this summer. The administrative draft of the EA is under Washington Office review. Funding is not expected in FY 11 but the staff hopes to have funding available at the start of FY 12 in October. The field office proposes removing about 1,200 wild horses, including animals that are roaming outside of designated herd management areas. The sex ratio will be adjusted to favor stallions and mares will be treated with fertility control. A population count will be done as part of the tri state horse population inventory that could occur in coming weeks.

Tri State Wild Horse and Burro Management

Nancy Haug reported that managers and staff from northern California, western Nevada and southern Oregon are working to better coordinated wild horse and burro management across jurisdictions. The work also involves the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which is addressing feral horses on refuge lands. The intent is to improve the information base and more closely coordinate management across the region.

Field Managers Reports

Ken Collum and Tim Burke presented written reports (attachments) updating the RAC on field office activities in the Eagle Lake and Alturas field offices..

Responses to questions:

Alturas

- There has been no progress on acquisition of the Infernal Caverns site or the Williams Ranch sites.
- The free wood permit program continues for a cutting area south of McArthur. Permits are available at the Lassen National Forest Hat Creek Ranger District.

Eagle Lake

- Coyote Bluff Trail improvements are within the Susanville Ranch Park on BLM-managed parcels.
- The Shoals Creek project will involve complete removal of encroaching juniper.

Allen Bollschweiler summarized activities on Surprise Field Office lands.

Next Meeting

Date: August 24-25.

The Eagle Lake Field Office will host. A field tour will be conducted on the first day.

Topics: Stewardship Contracting information, wild horse and burro status, wild lands policy alternative energy, PGE Status, RAC role in marijuana cleanup issues, Sage Steppe Restoration Strategy update and the Sage Steppe Technical Advisory Council. There will be a working lunch.